

Installation of Bill Mok at St. Chad's (Mk 5:21-43)

It seems appropriate to say Happy New Year!

As the grey and gloom of a very wet and even snowy Vancouver has been cloaked in a field of red and gold punctuated by firecrackers, dancing, and paper lanterns.....there is no denying that something wonderful and exciting is going on, even for those whom like myself approach the festivities as an eager learner hopeful to be able to better understand the cultural traditions of my friends and neighbours.

This past spring, my eagerness to better understand, and to be able to connect with my neighbours lead me to enroll in an intro to mandarin class. While I was able to learn a few words and characters what I appreciated most about the course was the way in which the instructor shared her culture and customs with us...in particular the celebration of Lunar New Year (ok ok --- so she brought us snacks and candy that week) but it really allowed us to get a taste for this fantastic celebration! As part of the unit, she recounted the tale of the Great Race, establishing the order of the Chinese zodiac. I had heard the story a number of times, but once again it brought a smile to my face as I heard the story of Rat outwitting Ox by catching a ride on his back to the finish line and the continued legacy to this day of Cat's unrelenting desire to catch the Rat.

Perhaps it was this story of the cunning Rat and knowing that we are celebrating the year of the Rat, that influenced my reading of scripture this day. But it became clear that if one was going to assign a passage of scripture to the Rat – it would likely be the one we heard from Marks Gospel today. For Rats are marked as a sign of wealth, surplus and abundance (in part because of their rapid rate of reproduction). But on the reverse side of things, those born in the year of the Rat are thought to have

frail health and are easily prone to sickness.¹ The story from Mark we hear this day, prominently features all of these themes.

The story in Mark's Gospel begins with a rich and wealthy man, Jairus. We quickly learn that Jairus' unnamed daughter of twelve years is near death – causing him, a person of power and privilege, a ruler with great wealth to respond counter culturally by seeking Jesus out as his last resort. In doing so he begs Jesus to come and lay hands on her, and Jesus' obliges

But while they are on the way to the young girls' bedside.... a crowd follows them.

In many ways, with the cleverness of Rat, the woman uses the momentum and the cover of the crowd to continue to work her way forward undetected.

I imagine her sneaking up from behind, maybe not even able to see Jesus, but rather strategically hunched over....her hand scrambling under the garments of the other travelers.....reaching out in blindness.... in faith....that she might touch his clothes.

In Jewish custom, the cloaks of the Pharisees had long fringes or tassels. Because of their authority within society, people imbued the fringe with mystical and sometimes magical qualities.² Her prayer for healing is not founded in science or facts but rather hangs on the promises repeated through old wives tales and superstition....on hope and faith in something unknown and the promise of something, someone, greater than herself.

In Marks account we hear, "Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd." When the woman ceases bleeding.... the same life force that has been flowing

out of her is experienced for the first time by Jesus himself, as he feels the power drained from him. A foreshadowing of things to come....he will no doubt feel the same way as he hangs on the hard wood of the cross. The sense of immediacy is echoed throughout the Gospel accounts but only in Mark's account do we hear it with such sense of urgency. The Greek word for "Immediately" *euthys* appears 58 times in the gospels and of those 41 are found in the shortest Gospel, that of Mark. "Immediately" --- is 15 more times likely to be found in Mark's account.³

The Anglican Journal, the national news source for the Anglican Church of Canada, recently published an article whose "Gone by 2040?" headline definitely caught people's attention.⁴ In fact, even those not connected to the church have been quick to bring it to my attention. The article is responding to reports received by General Synod, around statistics reporting rapid decline in church membership, predicting that at its current rate the church won't exist in 2040. I don't know about you.....but when I read articles like this, or when parishioners come to me scared about the end of the church, I admit it makes me want to close myself off a bit...I feel discouraged.....why bother with it all?

The work of discipleship is hard enough.....

we don't need folks telling us that the work we are doing is for not.....

or that come 2040 it won't matter.

Mark's sense of urgency is echoed in the need for the Anglican Church to do something now....or else.

I remain grounded a bit, reminding myself that Jesus didn't spend his day worrying about what the state of the church would be after he was gone.

Instead he had faith that God's will would continue to be done on Earth.

Confident that God's faithfulness would prevail.

That is the conviction and hope we see in Jairus as he seeks out Jesus to heal his daughter from the shackles of death that are closing in on her.

Confident that God's faithfulness will prevail.

That is the conviction and hope we see in the hemorrhaging woman as she reveals herself to Jesus, unsure of his response, but confident with every cell in her body that to be healed from this would be worth any cost.

Confident that God's faithfulness will prevail.

That is the conviction and hope that I see in our church.....in particular echoed in this community of St. Chad's, a congregation, from what I've learned, that has been flexible and adapted to the needs of its changing neighbourhood time and time again, at times with great risk, as it seeks to build up the Kingdom of God and serve as a faithful witness to God's love in this section of our city.

Confident that God's faithfulness will prevail.

I was grateful for the opportunity to have tea with Fr. Bill last week, in anticipation for this great celebration, and I know I was reassured by what I felt was our shared sense of hope and call for God's church. An eagerness to share the Good News in a way that heals and offers wholeness to our broken world and to the pieces of us that are broken or in need of Jesus' healing touch....that WE being so transformed by our experience in community, in prayer, in common worship, in study....become disciples that don't simply exist, but disciples that like Jairus daughter, get up, arise, and walk about – dance about...when invited by Jesus.

All of these stories offer a new way of being, of living, of existing, transformed by God's faithfulness.

This is not only the beginning of a new year!

It is a new season in Fr. Bills call as a priest in God's church, and in particular his appointment to serve with and alongside you as you continue to grow into the new ways Christ is calling you to get up!

It is a new and exciting time in the life of St. Chads!

My prayer for you this day is that you have the hopeful humility of Jairus,
the boldness of the hemorrhaging woman,
and the cleverness and perseverance of Rat as you continue to be transformed by God's
faithfulness in the weeks, months and years ahead.

Mk 5:21-43

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered round him; and he was by the lake. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, 'My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.' So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, 'If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.' Immediately her haemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my clothes?' And his disciples said to him, 'You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, "Who touched me?" ' He looked all round to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.'

While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, 'Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?' But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, 'Do not fear, only believe.' He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, 'Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.' And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, 'Talitha cum', which means, 'Little girl, get up!' And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

¹ Chinese New Year, <https://chinesenewyear.net/>

² "Jesus healing the bleeding woman" Available online: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus_healing_the_bleeding_woman

³ Mamatha, “Why is Immediately used So Much in the Gospel of Mark.”: 6 Feb 2019. Available online: <https://livingroomtheology.com/immediately-used-much-gospel-mark/>

⁴Folkins, Tali. “Gone by 2040?” Anglican Journal. 6 January 2020. Available online: <https://www.anglicanjournal.com/gone-by-2040/>